DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 411 CS 211 886

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TITLE Rethinking Remediation: Toward a Social-Cognitive Understanding of Problematic Reading and Writing. Technical Report No. 19.
INSTITUTION Center for the Study of Writing, Berkeley, CA.; Center for the Study of Writing, Pittsburgh, PA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE May 89
NOTE 19p.; An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Right to Literacy Conference (Columbus, OH, September 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Cognitive Style; Community Colleges; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; *Remedial Instruction; Research Needs; *Social Cognition; Student Writing Models; *Writing Instruction; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS Basic Writers; *Basic Writing

ABSTRACT

A case study, designed to provide information on what it is that cognitively and socially defines an underprepared student as underprepared, focuses on a piece of writing by a community college student from the inner city (Tanya) in a college-level basic reading and writing course. The study presents a "snapshot" of some of the social and cognitive variables surrounding this single piece of writing. It is part of a larger research project on remediation at the community college, state college, and university level. It is hoped that analysis of more of their data collected at the three sites will yield answers to the following questions: (1) What productive and counterproductive strategies characterize the writing and reading skills of underprepared students? (2) How are these strategies represented in the students' minds and what forces have influenced these current representations? (3) What tends to happen to these strategies during instruction? (4) What mismatches or points of convergence tend to occur between pedagogies/programs and students' background knowledge, experience, and goals? and (5) What are the social and institutional processes whereby students like Tanya are defined as deficient or remedial or substandard? (Twenty-four references are attached.) (RS)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING

Technical Report No. 19

RETHINKING REMEDIATION: TOWARD A SOCIAL-COGNITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMATIC READING AND WRITING

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The project presented, or reported herein, was performed pursuant to a grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement/Department of Education (OERI/ED) for the Center for the Study of Writing. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OERI/ED and no official endorsement by the OERI/ED should be inferred.

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RETHINKING REMEDIATION: TOWARD A SOCIAL-COGNITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMATIC READING AND WRITING[1]

by

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All about us we hear news of a literacy crisis in America: the technicians who cannot read manuals, the unemployed workers who must struggle to fill in the blanks on a job application, the fathers who fail to decode the printed stories in their children's primers, all sorts of people, young, old, of varied races whose facility with written language is sufficiently poor to impair their functioning day to day. Associated with these reports--sometimes sensibly, sometimes not--is America's other population, one that we know intimately: that significant stratum of students (variously termed "remedial," "non-traditional," "developmental," "underprepared," "non-mainstream") who enter higher education but are not prepared for the writing and reading tasks that they encounter.

Such students listen to teachers talk about sentence and paragraph structure, they fill in blanks in workbooks, they sit before material written in a language that is formal, complex, and strange. And they try to write. The small body of research that exists on what happens as such students try to write suggests that, for them, composing is a slow, often derailed process that proceeds via rules and strategies that are often dysfunctional. But that is about the extent of our knowledge. Teachers receive these students' essays and try to evaluate them and make inferences about what the students learned or didn't learn, what their cognitive capacity is, whether or not they're fit for the institution that already

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[1]An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Right to Literacy Conference in Columbus, Ohio, September, 1988. We would like to thank our colleagues for their assistance at various stages of this project: Kay Losey Fraser, Marisa Garrett, Peter Simon, Susan Thompson-Lowry, Smokey Wilson, Stephen Witte. Our work has been supported by the Spenser Foundation, The Center for the Study of Writing, and the James S. McDonnell Foundation's Program in Cognitive Studies for Educational Practice.

classifies them as marginal. And teachers do so with a pretty limited knowledge of the complex cognitive and social processes that produced the writing they read.

What Is Currently Known about Underprepared Students?

Current research on college-age underprepared students had its beginnings in the demographic and policy studies of the 1960s and 1970s--the era of open admissions. Schools began to welcome numbers of students who formerly had had no expectations of higher education and little preparation for it. There were several chroniclers of this era. The best known is Patricia Cross (1971), who described what she called the "non-traditional" or "new" students and argued that we couldn't teach such learners by "handing down the old education of traditional students" (p. 158). Among the learner characteristics shared by many non-traditional students, Cross noted poor study habits, poor basic skills, and academic failure. For the most part they come from impoverished backgrounds, financially as well as educationally. (See also Cross, 1976, 1981; Pitcher & Blaushild, 1970; Roueche & Snow, 1977.) Conclusions like these are useful for sketching the outlines of a picture, but they don't help us understand these learners' problems in any except the most general way. (They don't tell us, for example, how being fearful about academic failure plays itself out in a student's assumptions about reading and writing.)

Other studies have been more sociological in origin, attempting to place a school or a set of students within the context of the larger society, joining what goes on in school to economic, political, and cultural structures outside it. An example is Weis's (1985) excellent research on black students in an urban community college. Using ethnographic techniques, Weis spent a year doing field work--interviewing faculty and students, attending classes, conducting surveys. At the end of her research she argued "that black student culture at an urban community college acts primarily to ensure that the vast majority of students will return to the ghetto streets" (p. 159). And she lists, as one possibility for remedying this situation, "systematic instruction in reading and writing" (p. 166). (See Everhart, 1983, and Willis, 1977, for related sociological research.) Again, this is valuable research, for it helps us to see globally, to broaden our understanding of the forces which promote or prevent access to higher education for minority students. What we don't get from this kind of work is an understanding of how such forces are played out in the instruction that individual students receive. (How, for example, does the influence of black student culture affect the way a student perceives a particular reading or writing task? Or understands a teacher's comments on his essay? What exactly is "systematic instruction" on a given day such that it will counter unproductive attitudes toward reading and writing?)

Other sources of information on underpreparation are the familiar statistics collected by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the College Board's

Scholastic Aptitude Tests, and other large-scale assessment efforts. Most recently, NAEP (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986) released its findings on the literacy skills of young adults. An estimated five percent (or 10 million people) function below the fourth grade level on reading and writing performance. Around fifty percent of the nation's young adults possess what Thomas Sticht (in Kirsch & Jungeblut) calls "mid-level" literacy, which puts them far above the literacy levels of preceding generations, but discouragingly below the skills presumably needed in the information age. We quote these figures here, not in order to debate their interpretation, or even to use them as evidence of a "literacy crisis." Rather, we want to call attention to the kind of research they represent: standardized tests, surveys, performance measures. Such research can help establish the parameters of the problem, but we need fine-grained work to fill in the outlines.

When we turn to studies that are finer-grained, we find two sorts of research on writing that have focused on college-age students labelled "underprepared": textual analyses and process-tracing. Most of the research has been the former, text-based kind; that is, essays are evaluated for organization, development, syntactic maturity, the presence or absence of error, and so forth. The example *par excellence* of textual analysis is Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* (1977), a close reading of hundreds of essays written by underprepared students during the open admissions era of New York's City College. Shaughnessy categorized and interpreted students' errors by trying to imagine their sources. For example, she explains the syntax problem in the sentence, "the jobs that's are listed in the paper, I feel you need a college degree," as the result of the student's being unpracticed in expressing complex ideas in written language. This writer, Shaughnessy believed, first announced his topic in order to focus attention on it, and then followed the announcement with an observation on the topic that isn't grammatically joined to the topic statement (p. 66). Such close readings of students' essays make the extremely important point that error in student writing is sensible, has a logic. However, a teacher's reconstruction of a sentence is only one of many possible readings of it--readings which may or may not correspond to a student's process of composing. Text-based analyses are limited, then, in the degree to which they can offer definitive information on the cognitive and social factors that contribute to the production of texts.

There is a growing body of "process-tracing" research--studies which aim to describe the cognitive processes involved in writing and reading. Rather than trying to infer process from written product--that is, to look at an essay and try to figure out how a writer composed it--researchers have attempted to observe or to interact with writers either in the act of writing or afterwards in order to obtain an account of the mental operations involved in composing (see, for example, Flower & Hayes, 1981; Rose, 1984). We believe that process-tracing studies can give us important information about the production of texts. Unfortunately, not very much of this work has focused on students labelled "underprepared." Among a few exceptions is a study by Perl (1979). Using a case study approach, Perl had five

underprepared students think aloud as they composed two essays, and she charted the writing behaviors that she observed them exhibit. An important finding was that students had consistent composing processes--there were sequential patterns to prewriting, writing and editing--but their processes were dysfunctional. For example, the students so often interrupted themselves to edit--to correct a misspelling or to ponder how to punctuate--that they thwarted their attempts to compose. Vigilance for error, it appears, can slow down or otherwise constrain an underprepared student's composing process.

Other studies of underprepared students which have tried to understand process have looked at how students respond to error in their texts. Bartholomae (1980) instructed a basic writing student to read one of his compositions out loud and stop and correct any errors he found. The student automatically corrected many of the errors in his paper as he read it aloud, but he did not always recognize that there were errors on the page or that he had corrected them. Bartholomae used this case study to argue that textual analyses can't always be trusted to identify error sources reliably and, as well, to illustrate the value of students' oral reconstructions of their written texts as a diagnostic and instructional tool. He helped move us, then, from a consideration of underprepared writers as merely thwarted and beleaguered in their attempts to edit their writing to a recognition that students' editing behavior can sometimes reveal evidence of linguistic competence. (See also Hull, 1987).

As for reading skills, we know from various comprehension studies that poor college-age readers tend more to focus on details in the material they're reading and less on the gist--that is, they have trouble knowing what's important (Vipond, 1980). They have difficulty comprehending information that is not explicitly stated, difficulty in drawing inferences, and difficulty understanding literary devices such as metaphor and irony (Marshall & Glock, 1978-79). And they are less able to evaluate their understanding of expository prose--they have difficulty monitoring what they know and don't know (Baker, 1985).

These studies provide good data on what it is that poor college-age readers can't do well, but because they rely on various end measures, they do not access the cognitive processes behind these poor reading behaviors. While there are some process-tracing studies of poor junior high (Nicholson, 1984) and high school readers (Olshavsky, 1977), there are actually very few process-tracing studies of poor college-age and adult readers. (One exception is Johnston's [1985] three case studies of reading-disabled adults.) Since so much of the writing done in school and in the workplace is related to other reading (from simple requests to complex documents), it seems especially important to gain some insight into the cognition behind writing-related reading.

As valuable as the above studies are, then, we need further information on what it is that cognitively and socially defines an underprepared student as underprepared. What kind of knowledge does an underprepared student bring with

him to the classroom? How is the teacher representing the writing process and the writing task? How is the student, given her own background knowledge, representing the teacher's discussion of the writing process and the writing task? What occurs between the two in the classroom as they attempt to negotiate a common understanding of the task, and in what ways might that interaction further define the student as remedial? What happens when the student sits down to write? Researchers have few answers to these questions; there simply hasn't been a lot of research that addresses them.

A Case Study

We are conducting a research project on remediation at the community college, state college, and university level that, we hope, will begin to provide some information on what it is that cognitively and socially defines an underprepared student as underprepared. The writing and reading classes we chose to study are those considered to be the most remedial in each of the institutions we visited. Students in these classes are very much "at risk" to succeed, and, in some ways, they present profound challenges to the stated mission of the institutions that enroll them.

We would like now to focus on a piece of writing produced by Tanya, one of the students in a basic reading and writing class--close, in level, to an adult literacy program--in the urban community college we studied.[2] Tanya is nineteen years old, never finished high school, grew up in the inner city. We tutored her over a four month period. We asked her, in the instance we will focus on here, to write a kind of paper that was more difficult than any she had done so far, one closer to the school-based writing tasks she would eventually confront if she was able to move closer to her goal of becoming a nurse's aide or a licensed vocational nurse. To meet her interests, we provided a simple case study written by a nurse: "Handling the Difficult Patient." In the reading, the author gives a first-person account of her experiences with a very ornery patient. The nurse begins by sympathetically describing the patient--very ill, hooked to an IV, gaunt. She then details how she introduces herself and receives a response of anger and rejection: "you're killing me, you XXX!" The next nine paragraphs of the article were marked up by Tanya and figured prominently in the piece of writing she did for us. Those nine paragraphs are presented in Figure 1.

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[2] This piece of writing was also discussed in Hull, 1988. In that essay Tanya was identified as Ariel, a different pseudonym, a rather literary one, that tried to capture what seemed to us to be this student's essence--a mischievousness and a wonderful lightness of being in the face of very difficult circumstances.

Figure 1: Case Study of a Difficult Patient

"Oh, this is going to be a great day," I said to myself. "Just be patient, kind, and understanding. Maybe he only needs some TLC to alleviate his fears. He really seems more frightened than anything." With these thoughts, I began to care for him as skillfully as I could. (paragraph 4 of original text)

The day was exhausting. No matter what I did and no matter how gently I handled him, it was all to no avail. Sometimes the verbal abuse pounded and grated until it became almost physical. My nerves were frazzled; 3 P.M. just didn't come soon enough. (5)

In giving the evening nurse my report, I tried to provide a fair assessment of the situation and to prepare her for the ordeal that lay ahead. She was willing to give it a try, but if he proved too difficult, she said, she wouldn't remain on the case. (6)

My thoughts were similar, but deep down I really wanted to help him. What was the right approach? (7)

The next morning there was no night special to report. She had left the case, and the report she sent to the Registry of Nurses was so descriptive that it would be almost impossible to find a replacement. My second and third days were as terrible as the first. By the fourth day, the evening nurse decided she wouldn't take the abuse any longer and also left the case. To say I felt abandoned was an understatement; even the doctor didn't have any advice. (8)

The turning point came on my fifth day. I was attempting range of motion exercises with the patient. Despite his cursing, I explained the purpose of the therapy and told him I was doing it as gently as possible. He continued to object, and at one point I said, "I hope you understand that I'm doing this to help you." He growled sarcastically, "Oh, sure, girlie! You're doing this for me, are you? And I suppose for free, too." (9)

Well, five days of total frustration were enough. I was extremely hurt and angered. Retaliation had never been one of my methods, but this time it flowed out naturally. (10)

"You're right," I said. "I am getting paid for what I'm doing, but here's the difference: I have pride in my profession, and I earn my pay by giving my patients the best nursing care I possibly can. But I can give the minimum, too. I can sit here most of the day and still collect my 35 bucks at the end of the shift. If that's what

you want, the choice is yours. So make up your mind fast, because I'm not taking any more of your abuse." (11)

Then I stopped what I was doing, picked up the newspaper, and proceeded to read it. I felt terrible about speaking that way to a patient. Never before had this happened. My confidence in my ability to keep calm was as shaky as my hands were. The patient was asleep when I left at 3 P.M. (12)

We asked Tanya to write a summary of the article, explaining to her that a summary is a short version of a reading that reports its main points. It is "what you would tell someone who hadn't read the article if they asked you, 'Tanya, what was that about?'" To gain some access to Tanya's composing process, we used a stimulated recall procedure (Rose, 1984); that is, we videotaped Tanya as she wrote, recording the emergence of her text on the page. We then replayed the videotape to her to prompt her to recall what she was thinking as she wrote. The summary that Tanya wrote is given in Figure 2. After the whole process, we talked to her about her reading. We were satisfied that she had a general idea of what a summary is and that she understood the case study she had read.

Figure 2: Tanya's Summary of the Case Study

Page 1

The Handling About
difficult patient

this something telling about
a nurse ~~to~~ who won't to
help a patience.
She was a special night nurse,
this man had a stroke and
was ~~paral~~ paralsis on his
left side. She Was really
doing a lot for the patience
She Introduced myself
she asked him How was
he feeling. remark was,"
XXX, can't you see 'Im in
pain?" he telling the nurse
he was in so much pain.

Page 2

he really didn't won't
to answer her. Before
she was ready to give
him his I.V. Are Anything
XXX "you're killing me,
you XXX."
Oh this going to Be a great
Day I said to myself
just thinking alone.
I have pride in What
I Do I am going to get
pad no matter what I am
still ~~am~~ going to collect
my money no matter
what happen I do Believe
and I no that In ~~my~~ mind.
My thoughts were similar
but deep down.

Page 3

What was the approach?
A Registry nurse
was so descriptive.
impossible for me to
find a replacement.
My second and thirddays
she decided she ~~won~~ wouldn't
Abuse any longer and
~~Aso~~ also left the case
felt Abandoned was an
understatement; even
this doctor In this case
she Really liked what she
was doing But was getting
treated Right Respect.
She had chance of getting
A another job But ~~I~~ Don't
she wanted to But then again
She wanted to.

Tanya's summary is the kind of writing that feeds everyone's worries about the consequences of illiteracy and the failure of our schools. It will also suggest

to some people that this writer is somehow cognitively and linguistically deficient, that she is incoherent, can't think straight. But if we examine this piece of writing in context--taking into consideration the student's past experiences with schooling, her own peculiar notions about reading and writing, the instruction she is currently receiving, her plans and goals for her future--that is, if we assume a coherence, if we *assume* that a learner's performance at any time has a history and, as Shaughnessy taught us, a logic, then we will think about this text and the student who wrote it quite differently.

Part of the seeming incoherence of Tanya's text falls away when we look at the text she was summarizing. Tanya marked up the text she was reading, underlining and bracketing sentences and paragraphs that she considered important --paragraphs 7 and 11, for example. When we examine Tanya's summary against her marked up "source text," we see that she lifted some of these sentences and parts of sentences from the original and situated them in her summary, though not in the way we would expect. (See Figure 3.) For example, lines 23 through 40 of her summary are bits and pieces drawn from disparate parts of the original text.

Figure 3: Juxtaposing the Case Study and Tanya's Summary

Original Text	Student's Summary (Lines 23-40)
"Oh, this is going to be a great day," I said to myself. (Paragraph 4)	23 Oh this going to Be a great 24 Day I said to myself 25 just thinking alone.
I have pride in my profession. (Paragraph 11)	26 I have pride In What 27 I Do I am going to get
But I can give the minimum, too. I can sit here most of the day and still collect my 35 bucks at the end of the shift. (Paragraph 11)	28 pad no matter what I am 29 still ~~am~~ going to collect 30 my money no matter 31 what happen I do Believe 32 and I no that In ~~my~~ mind.
My thoughts were similar, but deep down I really wanted to help him. What was the right approach? (Paragraph 7)	33 My thoughts were similar 34 but deep down. 35 What was the approach?

. . . the report she sent
to the Registry of Nurses
was so descriptive that it
would be almost impossible
to find a replacement.
(Paragraph 8)

36 A Registry nurse
37 was so descriptive.
38 impossible for me to
39 find a replacement.

When we examine what Tanya takes from the case study, how she modifies those sentences and phrases, and how she situates them in her summary, we notice two things: she makes slight modifications in the original, changing a word here and there but copying whole chunks verbatim; and she juxtaposes segments of the original without connecting them each to the other. For example, a phrase taken from paragraph eleven in the original might be put next to one from paragraph seven, which might come next to one from paragraph eight--with no apparent attention to the features of discourse that allow readers to construct a coherent text.

Tanya had a patchwork approach to writing a summary, and when we began to talk to her, we learned why. We pointed to some of the sentences she had lifted from the case study and modified slightly before patching them into her summary. (For example, she changed the nurse's statement "I have pride in my profession" to "I have pride in what I do.") In response to our question as to the purpose of her modifications, she answered, "I have practice from when I try not to copy. When I get a little bit from there, a teacher'll really know what I'm talking about. . . . then if some parts from there I change a little bit, they know I'm not really that kind of student that would copy, 'cause another student would copy."

Tanya seems to be operating with two intentions here: to display and convey knowledge ("a teacher'll really know what I'm talking about") and to show she's "not . . . that kind of student that would copy." As we'll discuss shortly, Tanya very much wants to be a successful student this time around, so displaying knowledge is, for her, a powerful--and understandable--signal of her good academic citizenship. What is intriguing here, though, is the procedural rule she invokes when writing her summary: Change a few words so as not to copy. This injunction against plagiarism is probably a holdover from some past instruction. The thing that interests us about this rule is that it is a good reminder what a powerful hold negative injunctions can have on students, and it also recalls for us that school has been mainly punitive for Tanya. In our formal interviews with Tanya, in our talks with her after class, in her essays and writings across the semester, we heard many variations on this theme: being kicked out of five high schools her senior year, being hit on the hand with rulers, being chastised in the middle of reading class for not coming to school, feigning sleep for fear of being called on. Here is an example:

Tanya: I was scared a lot.

Interviewer: Just scared of reading out loud or . . . ?

Tanya: 'Cause see, the only reason I was scared was 'cause the teacher, she would look on an attendance list and she would see who was that person reading. And she would call out that person's name and ask you, "What is your problem" and look at my attendance and know that I ain't been coming to school. And she would get on me, and that's what I would be scared of. 'Cause she'd call my name out, have me to come up here and just stop everything.

--Interview on Oct. 6

We heard so many negative memories of schooling and literacy instruction, from Tanya and other students, that we began to appreciate anew the power of directives like "Don't plagiarize"--even when they aren't explained or aren't contextualized or in some other way don't make sense to students.

Another rule that seemed to govern Tanya's construction of the summary had to do with selection. Remember that she had marked up the case study, picking out things that interested her. We learned from our interviews with her that she changed whole sentences around, not only because she wanted to avoid plagiarism, but because "the parts about the nurse are something about me . . . you see 'I have pride,' you see, I can read that for me." In her construction of the summary, then, she seemed to privilege propositions that related to herself. While some of the details she selected to include in her summary contained its gist, she tended to choose details, not because they were important to the original text, but because they were important to her, and their placement, therefore, had more a personal than textual relevance.

We saw this again and again in both her reading and writing. Texts sometimes didn't appear to have a coherent identity apart from Tanya as a reader; the importance of the text tended to be in direct relation to its importance to her. This practice led some of her teachers to think she was a "flake," but we should also recall that the practice resembles the kinds of reading strategies that teachers might encourage her to use, that actually resemble expert ones: interact with the text, relate it to your own experiences, derive your own meaning from it. In fact, Tanya's reading teacher encouraged all her students to take what she called "star notes"--notes that would make you a star reader. These notes were really a dialogue that students were supposed to have with the author of a text.

Another way to understand Tanya's penchant for privileging propositions which related to herself is to read this strategy as an interesting assertion of her own self-worth in relation to a life and school history that had left her feeling like

she wasn't worth very much. A theme that rises, phoenix-like, from our many pages of transcripts of tutoring sessions and interviews is Tanya's assertion that she can do it, she can make it, she can learn and succeed.

> **"I'm going to get a little bit better in my reading and my math. All the rest I think I'm capable of doing." (Sept. 9, first interview statement)**
>
> **"I know I'm capable of doing anything in this whole world really." (Oct. 6)**
>
> **"I can do that too. [write a comparison/contrast essay] I can do a lot of things." (Oct. 20)**
>
> **"I could be anything if I wanted to be . . . like a doctor. I have the mind to go for it. . . . I really feel proud of myself, what I am, what I am doing for myself." (Oct. 20)**
>
> **"I know I can do it. I know I can do it. That's what I really need." [to improve her writing and math] (Oct. 27)**

The way Tanya aggressively appropriates the meaning of a text to suit her own interests parallels, for us, the chorus she repeats over and over again: I can make it, I have pride and confidence in myself, I really am going to be a nurse. Such goals and dreams allow her to identify with the nurse in the case study, and it is likely that they orient, to a disproportionate extent, her construction of that reading and writing task, and perhaps other school literacy tasks as well. Tanya had a lot of strikes against her: kicked out of school, on the outs with her mother and an overbearing stepfather, living on her own in a drug-infested apartment complex, pulled by a legion of boyfriends--"the only thing good in my life," she once said. Tanya has got to hold on for dear life to the idea that she can be a nurse, that she is important, that she can succeed.

Tanya's bizarre word salad is, perhaps, not so bizarre after all. Still, one's heart sinks when one places Tanya's statements about her hopes and dreams next to a text that, though now better understood, is still exceptionally flawed mechanically, grammatically, and orthographically. Her errors are the very stigma of illiteracy. What is a teacher to do? First, we would want to recall that Tanya's essay is a first draft, and our experience with her has shown us that--with instruction to revise and proofread--she would most likely correct some of her punctuation, capitalizing, and spelling errors. Still, a revised version would be littered with many errors, and it would be hard to ignore them. One of the rewards, though, that comes from working with marginal students is that they force you again and again to scrutinize your own reactions, to question your received assumptions about literacy and pedagogy, about cognition, and about the purposes of discourse. After wrestling with our own concerns about the errors in Tanya's

written language, about all those markers of illiteracy, it struck us that something profoundly literate is going on here. A fundamental social and psychological reality about discourse--oral *or* written--is that human beings continually appropriate each other's language to establish group membership, to grow, and to define themselves in new ways. Socially oriented linguists discuss the way this impulse plays itself out in speech, but it can occur as well with written discourse (cf. Bartholomae, 1985; Lanham, 1974; Witte, 1988).[3] It seems to us that Tanya's appropriation of the nurse's text--with enough words changed to signal that she's not the kind of student who would copy--is related to her desire to redefine her life, to make it, to be a nurse's aide or an LVN. Tanya is trying on the nurse's written language and, with it, the nurse's self.

A powerful pedagogic next move with Tanya, then, would be to temporarily suspend concern about error and pursue, full-tilt, her impulse to don the written language of another. What she seems to need at this point in her reentry into the classroom is a free-wheeling pedagogy of imitation, one that encourages her to try on the language of essays like the nurse's case study, essays related to health care that are accessible and tie in with Tanya's hopes for herself. Then, gradually, the teacher could begin calling attention to certain sentence patterns through a more focused imitation, could help Tanya mark and develop discourse patterns--like the chronological one she's trying to follow in the summary we presented, could show her some simple ways to effect coherent transitions from one bit of language to another, could teach her a few conventions that would enable her to use the texts of others in ways that show she's not copying. The teacher could, in short, help Tanya shape her writing in the way the nurse, and other such authors, are shaping theirs.

At the same time we outline a pedagogy to move Tanya toward a more conventional discourse, we want to be aware of what her unconventional performance can teach us. We are struck by her "plagiarism," for example, not only because it is so startling a departure from traditional ways of using a source text, but because it foregrounds for us what is often an unquestioned practice in the Western essayist tradition. We academic writers internalize rules and strategies for citing source texts, for acknowledging debts to previous scholarship, for separating what we can claim as our own ideas from the intellectual property of others. And we do so, once we have learned the tricks of our trade, almost without thinking, producing essays that seem to clearly mark where other people's ideas end and ours begin. Such clearly documented writing may let us forget, or even camouflage, how much more it is that we borrow from existing texts, how much we depend upon membership in a community for our language, our voices, our very arguments. We forget that we, like Tanya, continually appropriate each other's language to establish group membership, to grow, and to define ourselves

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[3] Thanks to Stephen Witte for helping us shape this discussion.

in new ways, and that such appropriation is a fundamental part of language use even as the appearance of our texts belies it.

We have given one snapshot of some of the social and cognitive variables surrounding one piece of writing from one of the students we studied in a community college. As we and those working on the project with us continue to examine our data--texts, videotapes of classroom interaction, audiotapes of tutorial sessions, speak-aloud and stimulated-recall sessions--we hope that our research will be able to provide answers to the following questions:

1. **What productive and counterproductive strategies, habits, rules, and assumptions tend to characterize the writing and reading skills of underprepared students?**

2. **How are these strategies represented in the students' minds, and what personal, social, and historical forces might have influenced these current representations?**

3. **What tends to happen to these strategies, rules, and assumptions during instruction?**

4. **What mismatches or points of convergence tend to occur between pedagogies/programs and students' background knowledge, experiences, and goals?**

5. **What are the social and institutional processes whereby students like Tanya are defined as deficient or remedial or substandard?**

What we are hoping to do with our research, then, is to bring to bear several layers of information on the problem of underpreparation in reading and writing. By comparing the data we collect in our three sites--the community college, state college, and university--and by making sure that our work is many-layered, we hope to construct rich descriptions of the knowledge, assumptions, and behaviors which characterize and influence underprepared students' creation and use of texts. In the process, we hope to devise a social and cognitive framework for analyzing the discourse produced by underprepared students, a framework that allows us to go beyond merely describing textual features, to understanding the production of those features. Moving from textual features, whether written or oral, to a description of the knowledge structures that yielded those features, and moving from a description of those knowledge structures to an understanding of their origin in a broader context is the tough problem that we want to work on. We hope, finally, to construct a set of vivid examples that might be used in teacher or tutor training, examples that illustrate dysfunctional reading and writing strategies and reveal the social and cognitive factors influencing them. We hope these vignettes will provoke some epiphanies, that they will move us all toward a different and richer representation of literacy

instruction for underprepared students--toward a re-definition of "remedial," away from the deficit orientation it currently has and toward a richer conception that is more informed and generative.

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